

PLAN WEST ASHLEY



West Ashley has always been a place of promise and hopefulness.

Here, at Charles Towne Landing, the modern settlement of Carolina began in the seventeenth-century under the Ashley Cooper Plan. In its day, that astonishing plan—now seen as an expression of the ideals of the Enlightenment—was perhaps the most forward-thinking, innovative document of its type in human history. It was far from perfect, but it was put forward as a hopeful model for wiser ways of living together in a New World.


The founding of Maryville / Ashleyville in the 1880s was another expression of hope and high aspirations. On land owned and governed by African Americans, a new town was laid out along the Ashley River. Fifth Avenue follows the alignment established by Carolina's earliest settlers, making it one of the oldest roads in the state.

In the postwar era and the decades that followed, the land west of the Ashley River was again the scene of the search for progress. This is where many in Charleston's hardworking Greatest Generation first moved to the suburbs, in search of a better life for themselves and their kids.

Those new suburbs offered their inhabitants many things, including green open space, fresh air, larger homes, a feeling of privacy, and good schools, to name a few. They still do. West Ashley residents love their neighborhoods, if not the rush hour traffic; this area of the city provides for a lifestyle not available in other parts of town. Several generations later, residents remain loyal to West Ashley, and are devoted to its community buildings, its green spaces, and each other.

Decades later, however, it has begun to be clear that the full promise of West Ashley has yet to be realized. A new generation of progress is needed to address the problems that have surfaced during rapid growth. Today citizens of West Ashley are deeply concerned about the loss of open space now covered in pavement, the degradation of their tranquil natural environment, and troubling episodes of flooding. They point to crippling traffic congestion, housing costs that are rising faster than incomes, and unsteady businesses as reasons why now is the time to be visionary and rethink what the future should be like, especially in any new development and along the aging commercial corridors.

The overarching idea behind the Plan for West Ashley is an embrace of Charleston's traditional faith in progress. West Ashley should strive to reflect the very best balance of livability, efficiency, environmental stewardship, sensible transportation, prudent regulation, and private property rights.



This Plan was shaped by the input of hundreds of community members over numerous meetings and workshops held throughout West Ashley. The result is a thoughtful retooling of the public policies that help to shape growth and preservation in West Ashley. Crucially, these policies are not the City's alone to change; progress will require modernizing and bringing coherence to an interconnected web of rules, budget priorities and long-range visions on the part of the City, Charleston County, and the state. It will take sensible investment on the part of private property owners. This will not happen overnight. It will take time, vigilance, and diligent effort.

A primary purpose of the Plan for West Ashley is to direct the growth and maximize prosperity and other benefits while minimizing the negative impacts of any remaining future development. It does this by calling for complete, livable neighborhoods, better connected to their surroundings, designed with environmental sensitivity. At the same time, this plan calls for leveraging new mobility technology and making small, non-invasive infrastructure interventions in existing residential subdivisions, to give more people more chances for walking, biking and using public transit.

To achieve these realistic but ambitious goals, remaking certain nodes along West Ashley's commercial corridors into mixed-use centers and mobility hubs is a central strategy. These sites present the greatest opportunity for focused interventions to remedy West Ashley's challenges while strengthening surrounding neighborhoods. This strategy will direct growth on the right places to build instead of the wrong ones. It will bring jobs and services closer to where people live, and boost the value and utility of existing homes, while reducing how far people have to drive and reducing the number of trips taken by car. This approach stresses the preservation of the single-family residential character of existing neighborhoods by providing other, better locations for new growth. Introducing a range of new housing choices and prices will provide more options for an increasingly diverse population. Crucially, minimizing the amount of land consumed and paved to accommodate population growth will help to reduce flooding problems and, in time, better address the challenge of adapting to sea level rise.

A more resilient West Ashley, where life gets better in both the near term and long term, is within reach.

VISION

The purpose of *Plan West Ashley* is to set policies and identify future public and private actions aimed at enhancing quality of life and protecting the area's historic, cultural and natural environment. Five big ideas, organized around the topics of Community Design & Land Use, Transportation, Infrastructure & Sustainability, Housing, and Economic Development, form the foundation of the plan. Outlined at right, these ideas assert that in the future West Ashley can be ***Upgraded, Connected, Resilient, Affordable, and Focused.***

Plan West Ashley gives needed attention and focus to planning for a sustainable future for this important collection of Charleston neighborhoods. Plan ideas were generated by community members through public input sessions, and informed by meetings with stakeholders and technical experts. Organized by topic, each chapter of this report contains a summary of existing conditions, community concerns, vision/goals to address community concerns, and finally implementation steps for immediate (1-2 years) near-term (2-5 years) and longer-term (greater than 5 years) timeframes.

Although there are some universal truths about the current built environment in all of West Ashley, to be effective recommendations have also been thought about and detailed at the neighborhood and block scale. Portions of this report define two distinct regions within West Ashley: “inner West Ashley”, the area east of I-526; and “outer West Ashley”, the area to the west of I-526. Settled over different timelines, each area has unique strengths and challenges to be addressed. Recommendations for focus areas within each illustrate how larger plan ideas could be applied to specific streets and parcels.

Inner West Ashley, the area east of I-526, is home to the oldest settlements in West Ashley and thus significant historic and cultural resources, including Charles Towne Landing (the birthplace of South Carolina) and the Maryville/Ashleyville neighborhoods, among others. Preservation of neighborhood character is a primary concern. Much of today's built environment was constructed just after World War II and, after more than 60 years, is now reaching a point where new investment is needed, particularly along the commercial corridors. *Plan West Ashley* can drive this “renew and refresh” effort. Aging commercial corridors that are generally

located on the highest land, and along the path of important transportation infrastructure with access to downtown and North Charleston, contain sites with the great potential for future change. These areas can better serve surrounding neighborhoods with a new mix of uses, including places of employment and affordable living opportunities.

Outer West Ashley, the area west of I-526, is home to newer neighborhoods. Compared to the east, this area has larger recreational/open spaces, planned and built in conjunction with neighborhoods. Automobile traffic is a major concern because there is no other viable way for many people to reach places of work or places of leisure. A continued pattern of development that encourages single-uses and low densities has added to the existing congestion. There is an opportunity for the *Plan West Ashley* vision to guide interventions in focused areas, including making more destinations closer to existing residential areas, and increasing the availability of alternate viable transportation options, so that future, targeted growth can be better accommodated. In addition, the vision defines strategies to bring increased resilience in light of climate change and sea level rise, particularly for low-lying areas vulnerable to frequent flooding.

Plan West Ashley is just one of many initiatives currently underway to secure a more prosperous future. Among these initiatives are Charleston County's ½ cent sales tax projects, and numerous economic development, housing, open space, sustainability, and preservation plans. Completion of I-526 as it is now planned, in a multimodal fashion (to accommodate cars, pedestrians, cyclists and transit riders), is key among these initiatives. The City supports I-526 to better connect West Ashley to the greater region and relieve pressure on other important corridors. The I-526 connection has been considered and integrated into each aspect of the Plan. Other simultaneous efforts include an in depth study of stormwater/drainage for the Church Creek and Wappoo basins, and BCDCOG's regional transportation studies. *Plan West Ashley* has considered and incorporated the findings of relevant previous and current studies; this comprehensive vision can guide and inform more in-depth plans and studies, and focus funding for proposed improvements where it can be most effective to meet identified community needs.

UPGRADED Community Design & Land Use:

grow in the right places, in the right ways; preserve neighborhood character; focus new development in clear, identified areas; enhance community brand and identity; reuse vacant commercial sites, and improve the character of those sites; shorten trips with new work, entertainment, and recreation destinations; provide better infrastructure to support the growing population

CONNECTED Transportation:

connect West Ashley to the wider region, and connect the neighborhoods within West Ashley; provide vehicular capacity and safety improvements in targeted locations; provide better pedestrian and bike safety; expand the bikeway and the greenway; invest in transit enhancements and upgrades; create more efficient connections across the Ashley River

RESILIENT Infrastructure & Sustainability:

create a path towards building resilience; grow within lower-risk areas, decrease overall impervious area; address drainage and prioritize maintenance; keep natural areas natural; grow and connect the green network

AFFORDABLE Housing:

maintain affordability; add more housing options, while maintaining the community's character; provide parks, natural open space, and community facilities

FOCUSED Economic Development:

attract more jobs to West Ashley; transform the Citadel Mall into a mixed-use center; recruit and support small and local businesses; add more recreational, cultural, and civic facilities to the area; refresh existing shopping centers; establish small-scale community shopping west of I-526